

Playing the Fool: The Subversive Literary Apologetics of John Bunyan and Blaise Pascal

Pascal

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Abstract

John Bunyan and Blaise Pascal seem unlikely bedfellows – a fiercely Protestant English artisan with only vernacular literacy and a devoutly Catholic French polymath. Yet there are striking affinities between the two in their theologies, spiritual experience, and apologetic methodologies. Both believe that conversion requires divine intervention, yet both quote St Paul's words *Fides ex auditu* / "Faith cometh by hearing" (Romans 10:17), thus involving human persuasion in conversion. Though both sometimes employ rational propositional arguments, both see rational argument as insufficient to change a person's affections and will. Both Bunyan and Pascal adopt literary strategies of persuasion to faith that seek to bypass and subvert their readers' cognitive defences.

Pascal's famous "wager" (*pari*) is often criticised for seeking to compel an impossible belief in something of which one is not persuaded. However, this criticism misconstrues the literary context. In this section of the *Pensées*, Pascal is speaking "selon les lumières naturelles" ("according to natural lights"), adopting St Paul's rhetorical strategy of "speak[ing] as a fool" (2 Corinthians 11:23) by inhabiting and subverting the thought categories of his pragmatically self-interested worldly readers. His initial goal here is not to compel belief but to persuade readers to participate in a sacramental environment in which they can more readily be habituated into faith. Bunyan's literary apologetic likewise draws on the model of St Paul and Bunyan's imaginative fiction is a form of playing the fool which, like Pascal's apologetic literary strategy, appropriates and reinscribes the thought categories of readers towards a vital faith.

Keywords: John Bunyan, Blaise Pascal, Christian apologetics, imagination.

This article is something of an experiment – originating as a paper for the 2016 conference of the International John Bunyan Society in Aix-en-Provence, I took inspiration from the location and decided to seek to connect Bunyan's writing and thought to that of a French counterpart. While some of the parallels I draw here may be somewhat impressionistic, I hope that this

piece, whose final version is being submitted on the eve of the United Kingdom perhaps leaving the European Union, will open up new spaces for more detailed work in comparative intellectual history that demonstrates ongoing affinities between Britain and the European continent.

John Bunyan and Blaise Pascal seem unlikely bedfellows. Bunyan was a fiercely Protestant English artisan who was literate only in his own English vernacular – a tinker who fought in the First Civil War of 1642–1646 in the parliamentary army, Bunyan became a lay preacher and eventually pastor of a separatist congregation in Bedford. While a prolific writer of non-fictional didactic treatises as well as narrative fictions, Bunyan is best remembered as the author of *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678, often now published with its 1684 sequel *The Second Part of the Pilgrim's Progress*), an allegory of the Christian life in the form of a dangerous journey from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City, much of which was probably written during Bunyan's imprisonment for unlicensed preaching.¹

Pascal, on the other hand, was a devoutly Catholic French polymath some of whose contributions to science and mathematics in fields such as geometry (e.g. Pascal's triangle), fluid mechanics (e.g. Pascal's law/principle), and probability (including written dialogues with Pierre de Fermat of "last theorem" fame)² endure to this day.³ Pascal was also a prolific writer,

¹ Perhaps the most comprehensive scholarly biography situating Bunyan in his context is Richard L. Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory: John Bunyan and English Dissent*, Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 2002, and a brief introduction for beginners can be found in Tamsin Spargo, *John Bunyan* (Writers and their Work series), Tavistock, Northcote House, 2016. More recent studies I would particularly recommend include Michael Davies, *Graceful Reading: Theology and Narrative in the Works of John Bunyan*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, and Nancy Rosenfeld, *John Bunyan's Imaginary Writings in Context*, New York/Abingdon, Routledge, 2018. Key multi-author reference works include Anne Dunan-Page (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bunyan*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, and Michael Davies and W. R. Owens (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of John Bunyan*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018, which also provide judicious suggestions for further reading. For further bibliographical guidance, see the International John Bunyan Society's online bibliography: <https://johnbunyansociety.org/bunyan-bibliography/>. The IJBS journal *Bunyan Studies* is also recommended.

² See, for instance, Oystein Ore, "Pascal and the Invention of Probability Theory", *American Mathematical Monthly*, 67:5, May 1960, p. 409-419; A. W. F. Edwards, "Pascal's work on Probability", in *The Cambridge Companion to Pascal*, Nicholas Hammond (ed.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 40-52. On the Pascal-Fermat correspondence, see Keith Devlin, *The Unfinished Game: Pascal, Fermat, and the Seventeenth-Century Letter That Made the World Modern*, New York, Basic Books, 2008.

³ Useful introductions to Pascal's life and thought include Jean Mesnard, *Pascal: L'Homme et L'Œuvre*, Paris, Boivin & Cie, 1951, Henri Gouhier, *Blaise Pascal: conversion et apologétique*, Paris, Vrin, 1986; and Jacques Attali, *Blaise Pascal ou le génie français*, Paris, Fayard, 2000. English-language introductions include Alban Krailsheimer, *Pascal* (Past Masters series), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1980; Donald Adamson, *Blaise Pascal: Mathematician, Physicist and Thinker about God*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 1995; John R. Cole, *Pascal: The Man and His Two Loves*, New York, New York University Press, 1995; Graeme Hunter, *Pascal the Philosopher: An Introduction*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2013, and N. Hammond (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Pascal*, op. cit.

although, whereas all of Bunyan's writings are predominantly religious in focus (though capable of division between didactic non-fiction and imaginative narratives), Pascal's writings divide roughly into mathematical-scientific treatises and religious-philosophical writings, (though with differences of genre within these broad categories).⁴

Multiple conversions

Bunyan and Pascal are sometimes paired as exemplars of striking religious experience, particularly in relation to their experiences of conversion,⁵ yet they have not generally been compared as thinkers. Despite significant differences in their cultural, social, intellectual, and ecclesiastical locations, there are striking affinities between Bunyan and Pascal in their theologies, spiritual experience, and apologetic methodology. Both Bunyan and Pascal undertook a winding and sometimes traumatic path towards their settled spiritual identities and convictions. Both stressed the need for an inward conversion of the heart and critiqued external religious observance as insufficient for salvation – in the terms of Molly Murray's pithy formulation it is conversion as a "change of soul" rather than a "change of church" that they emphasise (although for both a "change of soul" was expressed through a visible change in religious affiliation).⁶ However, the biographies of both men frustrate attempts to pinpoint a clear moment when such a conversion takes place: both Bunyan and Pascal have multiple apparent "conversions" or moments of epiphany that move them forward, but are also subject to setbacks that make it harder to pin down a definitive and final moment of conversion.

In Bunyan's case, he designates some of these apparent conversions as false starts.⁷ Early on in his spiritual autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666), Bunyan describes how his first wife (notoriously unnamed) brought as part of her dowry two religious books, Arthur Dent's *The Plain Man's Path-way to Heaven* (a didactic dialogue on

⁴ For instance, Pascal's religious writings include the polemical humour of *Lettres Provinciales* (*Provincial Letters*), a series of pseudonymous attacks on the Jesuits that often use satire to mock the supposed moral laxity of Jesuit casuistry.

⁵ E.g. A. J. Krailsheimer, *Conversion*, London, SCM, 1980, chapters 4 (Pascal; p. 59-69) and 6 (Bunyan, p. 82-91).

⁶ Molly Murray, *The Poetics of Conversion in Early Modern English Literature: Verse and Change from Donne to Dryden*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 7.

⁷ For more on Bunyan's multiple "conversions", see, for instance, Anne Hawkins, "The Double-Conversion in Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*", *Philological Quarterly*, 61:3, Summer 1982, p. 259-276, and David Parry, "'God breaketh not all men's hearts alike': Early Modern Conversion Narratives in Contemporary Perspective", *The Glass*, 25, Spring 2013, p. 3-17, esp. p. 5-8.

conversion and the Christian life that arguably helped to shape the literary mode Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*), and Lewis Bayly's *The Practice of Piety*. These books, Bunyan reports, "did beget within me some desires to Religion", but "because I knew no better, I fell in very eagerly with the Religion of the times, to wit, to go to Church twice a day, and that too with the foremost, and there should very devoutly both say and sing as others did; yet retaining my wicked life".⁸ This outward devotion to the conformist religion of the established Church is dismissed by the older Bunyan narrating his life as mere superstition:

I was so over-run with the spirit of superstition, that I adored, and that with great devotion, even all things, (both the High-place, Priest, Clerk, Vestments, Service, and what else) belonging to the Church; counting all things holy that were therein contained; and especially the Priest and Clerk most happy, and without doubt greatly blessed, because they were the Servants, as I then thought, of God, and were principal in the holy Temple, to do his work therein.⁹

Nevertheless, although a misstep akin to that advocated by conformist characters in *The Pilgrim's Progress* such as Formalist and Hypocrisy, that would in itself tend towards damnation if not corrected,¹⁰ this can still be seen as the beginning of an awakening towards the need for divine presence that comes to fruition in Bunyan's later conversion to a saving dependence on the supernatural intervention of divine grace.

In the version of his spiritual progress recounted by Bunyan, his turn to conformist religious practice not accompanied by a fitting life displaying repentance is followed by an "outward Reformation, both in my words and life", leading Bunyan to remark, "I thought I pleased God as well as any man in *England*".¹¹ Bunyan even uses the term "conversion" for this moral reformation:

But, I say, my Neighbours were amazed at this my great Conversion, from prodigious profaneness, to something like a moral life; and, truly, so they well might; for this my Conversion was as great, as for *Tom of Bethlem* to become a sober man.¹²

⁸ John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* [1666], ed. Roger Sharrock, Oxford, Clarendon, 1962, p. 8-9.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁰ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress from this World to that which is to Come* [1678/1684], ed. James Blanton Wharey, rev. ed. Roger Sharrock, Oxford, Clarendon, 1960, p. 39-42.

¹¹ J. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, ed. cit., p. 12.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Yet while this striving for morality might appear preferable to the hypocrisy of religious practice without moral reform, it too falls short of true conversion. This is because it betrays a reliance on keeping God's commandments as the way to salvation, which Bunyan as a pastor in the Reformation tradition rejects as a failure to understand the proper relation between the Law and the Gospel.

An equivalent episode in allegorical form is found in *The Pilgrim's Progress* when Mr Worldly-Wiseman entices Christian to leave the path leading to the narrow gate to take an apparent shortcut to being relieved of his burden of guilt.¹³ Worldly-Wiseman directs Christian to the village of Morality where lives a man named Legality and his son Civility, characters who evoke the perennial errors of religious moralism that seeks salvation through good works rather than grace, as well as the particular ethos of a post-Restoration latitudinarian religion of politeness and good behaviour that de-emphasises contentious notions of grace and election.¹⁴ Christian is frightened back onto the right path when the steep hill he has to climb (identified in the margin as "*Mount Sinai*") "did hang so much over, that Christian was afraid to venture further, lest the *Hill* should fall on his head".¹⁵

True saving faith for Bunyan entails a reliance on the merits of Christ's righteousness that is given to the elect through their union with Christ, and in no way a reliance on one's own merits. True conversion for Bunyan thus entails the individual believer both coming to share that conviction and coming to an inward apprehension that he or she participates in the saving merits of Christ. However, even when defined thus, it is difficult to pinpoint an exact moment of conversion for Bunyan.

There are several better candidates for a true conversion moment after Bunyan comes into contact with the Bedford Independent congregation. The first of these is a notable

¹³ J. Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. cit., p. 16-25.

¹⁴ On the "religion of grace" championed particularly by Nonconformists and the "religion of reason" associated with the latitudinarians, see especially Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660–1780*, vol. 1: *Whichcote to Wesley*, Cambridge University Press, 1991.

¹⁵ J. Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. cit., p. 20. For more on this episode, see U. Milo Kaufmann, *The Pilgrim's Progress and Traditions in Puritan Meditation*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1966, p. 15-21 (focusing on how the episode combines doctrinal instruction with imaginative appeal), and David Parry, "'Lutherus non vidit Omnia': The Ambivalent Reception of Luther in English Puritanism", in Herman J. Selderhuis and J. Marius J. Lange van Ravenswaay (eds), *Luther and Calvinism: Image and Reception of Martin Luther in the History and Theology of Calvinism*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017, p. 379–407, here p. 399–400.

encounter in which Bunyan's work as a tinker brings him to Bedford, "where there was three or four poor women sitting at a door in the Sun, and talking about the things of God". Though "now a brisk talker also my self in the matters of Religion", Bunyan finds that

*I heard, but I understood not; for they were far above out of my reach, for their talk was about a new birth, the work of God on their hearts, also how they were convinced of their miserable state by nature.*¹⁶

These uneducated women have an experiential grasp of the relationship between law and grace that Bunyan lacks, although they struggle to answer his questions and so introduce him to their pastor John Gifford, whose guidance precipitates a long period of struggle culminating in Bunyan's admission to the Bedford congregation and the start of the preaching ministry that led to his writing career.¹⁷

The doorway in which the women are sitting seems to have a symbolic as well as a literal function – it marks the liminal transition point into the world of grace from which Bunyan is then excluded.¹⁸ This symbolic significance is confirmed by the young Bunyan's subsequent vision of the women as "if they were set on the Sunny side of some high Mountain, there refreshing themselves with the pleasant beams of the Sun, while I was shivering and shrinking in the cold, afflicted with frost, snow, and dark clouds". In Bunyan's vision he has a long struggle to find the doorway through the wall that separates him from these women, though eventually "with great striving, me thought I at first did get in my head, and after that, by a side-ling striving, my shoulders, and my whole body".¹⁹

This visionary struggle prefigures the long series of ups and downs that follow this episode in Bunyan's quest for an assurance that God's grace applies to him personally, with duelling biblical texts at times seeming to threaten damnation and at times to offer salvation. It is the frequently oscillating and unstable nature of this struggle that often frustrates readers and makes it hard to pinpoint a single moment of conversion. A 1982 article by Anne Hawkins

¹⁶ J. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, ed. cit., p. 14.

¹⁷ On this period, see especially R. L. Greaves, *op. cit.*, Chapter 2, "Spiritual and Psychological Crisis", p. 30-74.

¹⁸ Psychoanalytic readings of this episode and its imagery can be found in Vera J. Camden, "John Bunyan and the Goodwives of Bedford: A Psychoanalytic Approach", in A. Dunan-Page (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bunyan*, *op. cit.*, p. 51-64, and Thomas H. Luxon, "'Other Mens Words' and 'New Birth': Bunyan's Antihermeneutics of Experience", *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 36:3, Fall 1994, p. 259-290, here p. 276-283. Cf. R. L. Greaves, *op. cit.*, p. 41-43.

¹⁹ J. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, ed. cit., p. 19-20.

speaks of “The Double-Conversion in Bunyan’s *Grace Abounding*”, suggesting that the “nature of Bunyan’s conversion” is “a kind of conversion which is by definition diffuse, repetitive, and cumulative.”²⁰

Though Hawkins’s term is distinctive in Bunyan studies, Pascal’s biographers and analysts frequently describe him as having a “first conversion” and a “second conversion”.²¹ Pascal was born and raised in a conventionally Catholic French family. What is often dubbed Pascal’s first conversion refers to an episode in which his father Étienne Pascal (1588–1651) fell and dislocated his leg in January 1646, and was treated over three months by two brothers of the noble Deschamps family, motivated by their newfound piety to charitable works such as amateur bonesetting. As with Bunyan, Étienne Pascal was moved towards a new understanding of Christianity through the discourse of enthusiastic lay Christians belonging to a somewhat dissident expression of Christian faith, that of the Jansenists.²²

Though too close a correlation is fraught with problems, Jansenists have been described as “Catholic Puritans” in recognition of affinities with this Protestant Anglophone movement.²³ Robin Briggs notes:

Puritans and Jansenists could never have understood one another directly in any case, because they belonged to different epochs as well as different faiths. Historians have nevertheless drawn close parallels between the two movements, with their predestinarian, Augustinian theology, their desire to revive the virtues of the primitive church, and their strict moral standards. One particularly tiresome characteristic shared by puritanism and Jansenism is their resistance to any attempt at close definition.²⁴

²⁰ A. Hawkins, art. cit., p. 259.

²¹ For instance, Henri Gouhier, “Le Mémorial est-il un texte mystique?”, in *Blaise Pascal: L’homme et l’œuvre*, Paris, Éditions de Minuit, 1956, p. 298; A. J. Krailsheimer, *Pascal*, op. cit., p. 7-9; J. R. Cole, op. cit., p. 64-71, 93-98.

²² On Jansenism, see, for instance, Ephraim Radner, “Jansenism”, in Ulrich L. Lehner, Richard A. Muller, and A. G. Roeber (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theology, 1600–1800*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, advance online access 2015; Robin Briggs, *Communities of Belief: Cultural and Social Tensions in Early Modern France*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1989, Chapter 8, “The Catholic Puritans: Jansenists and Rigorists in France”, p. 339-363; Leszek Kolakowski, *God Owes Us Nothing: A Brief Remark on Pascal’s Religion and on the Spirit of Jansenism*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1995; and Jean-Louis Quantin, *Le Rigorisme Chrétien*. Paris, Cerf, 2001; Thomas Palmer, *Jansenism in England: Moral Rigorism across the Confessions*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018.

²³ See, for instance, R. Briggs, op. cit. Briggs’s suggestion of affinities between Jansenists and Puritans is drawn upon in Bernard Cottret, Monique Cottret and Marie-José Michel (eds), *Jansénisme et Puritanisme*, Paris, Nolin, 2002, though Jean-Louis Quantin has more recently dismissed these parallels as relatively superficial, suggesting connections rather between Port-Royal and high church Anglicans.

²⁴ R. Briggs, op. cit., p. 339.

Associated especially with the religious community of Port-Royal, its spiritual director Jean du Vergier de Hauranne (better known as the abbé (de) Saint-Cyran), and his mentor the Flanders bishop Cornelius Jansen, Jansenism combined an austere Augustinian view of predestination,²⁵ a present expectation of the miraculous akin to other “enthusiastic” and “charismatic” movements through Christian history,²⁶ an ideal of personal devotion and holy living on the part of lay Christians as well as clergy, and a strict Catholic view of the necessity of the Church and the sacraments.²⁷ Though a separatist by conviction and thus differing from earlier Puritans within the established Church, Bunyan’s broadly Puritan outlook would share the predestinarian, pietistic and conversionist impulses of Pascal’s Jansenist orientation, while strongly opposing the Catholic ecclesiological claims Pascal and the Jansenists would uphold.

Several members of the family including Étienne and his daughters, were persuaded to submit themselves to the spiritual direction of the Jansenist priest M. Guillebert, signalling an acceptance of the Jansenist vision of inward conversion and the sanctified life. Blaise Pascal’s personal convictions at this stage are less certain, but he seems to have acquired at least some loyalty to the Jansenists and their vision of faith over against others available in seventeenth-century France.

What is called Pascal’s “second conversion” is Pascal’s famous experience of the *nuit de feu*, “the night of fire”, on 23 November 1654. This is an experience of which we only know through the posthumous discovery of a single document hidden in the lining of Pascal’s coat

²⁵ Although some of their fellow Catholic critics accused them of crypto-Calvinism, Jansenists were at pains to deny such affinities with Protestant “heretics”: Graham Tomlin, *The Power of the Cross: Theology and the Death of Christ in Paul, Luther and Pascal*, Milton Keynes, Paternoster, 1999, p. 200; L. Kolakowski, *op. cit.*, p. 3-9, 12-14, 51-52; R. Briggs, *op. cit.*, p. 340-343. Briggs notes:

Pascal and others tried to dissociate themselves from Calvin by rejecting the doctrine of “double predestination”, under which the reprobate are as positively chosen by God as the elect, and by maintaining a tenuous element of free will. Although such distinctions are perfectly valid, they are also very fine; paraphrasing Bayle, I think an honest reader must conclude that Calvinists and Jansenists were far closer to one another than they were to the “new theology” of the Molinists. (p. 342)

²⁶ T. S. Eliot finds Pascal’s appeal to contemporary miracles in support of Christian faith to be incongruous with identifying him as a “typical Christian apologist”, but this arguably betrays an artificial limitation on Eliot’s part on what counts as rational evidence for faith (T. S. Eliot, “The *Pensées* of Pascal” [1931], in *Selected Essays*, 3rd ed. London, Faber and Faber, 1951, p. 402-16, here p. 409). On the role of spiritual experience, including that of the miraculous, within Pascal’s apologetic reasoning, see see Janelle Aijian, “Baptism by Fire: The Work of the Holy Spirit in Pascal’s Philosophy”, in Wolfgang Vondey (ed.), *The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life: Historical, Interdisciplinary, and Renewal Perspectives*, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, pp. 125-41.

²⁷ See A. J. Krailsheimer, *Pascal*, *op. cit.*, p. 73-74, on how Pascal saw it as essential to remain in ecclesial communion with the Pope even though the Pope might fall into error on certain matters. The Jansenists did not see the sacraments as only outward signs without saving efficacy, as did Bunyan; rather, they saw the Catholic sacraments as essential but efficacious only when coupled with interior conversion.

and known as the “Memorial”.²⁸ In this document, written in a fragmentary note-like form, Pascal testifies to an experiential encounter with the divine expressed as “Feu” (“Fire”) over two hours, leading him away from the God of the philosophers (“non des philosophes et des savants” to the “Dieu d’Abraham, Dieu d’Isaac, Dieu de Jacob” (“God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob”) found through Jesus Christ, an experience prompting “Soumission totale à Jésus Christ et à mon directeur” (“Total submission to Jesus Christ and my [spiritual] director”).²⁹ Chronologically, it is after this second conversion that Pascal’s scholarly and writing skills are directed towards the cause of apologetics on behalf of Christian belief in general and the Jansenist vision of Christian life in particular.

The French Catholic philosopher Maurice Blondel (1861–1949), writing in the 1920s, accepts this designation of Pascal’s two conversions, calling the first a “conversion plutôt des idées et des attitudes” (“a conversion more of ideas and attitudes”) and the second “celle du cœur” (“that of the heart”).³⁰ However, Blondel speaks of three rather than two conversions, the third conversion being a continuous one:

une troisième conversion sans secousse, ou plutôt elle est la suite et l’achèvement des autres conversions, celle qui, déjà sous-jacente aux deux premières, a été continuée et profonde pour l’amener laborieusement à être pleinement lui-même.³¹

a third conversion without a jolt, or rather it is the continuation and completion of the other conversions, that which, already underlying the first two, was continuous and deep in order laboriously to bring him to be fully himself.

Faith comes by hearing: Augustinianism and the double agency of conversion

For both Bunyan and Pascal, although saving faith is an internal matter of the heart, their spiritual quests culminate with a visible identification with an ecclesial community, which in both cases was a believing community somewhat at odds with the social and religious establishment. In the case of Bunyan, this was the Independent congregation of Bedford, which

²⁸ On the Memorial, see, for instance, A. J. Krailsheimer, *Pascal*, *op. cit.*, p. 69-71; G. Tomlin, *op. cit.*, p. 208–212.

²⁹ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées sur la Religion et sur quelques autres sujets*, ed. Louis Lafuma, Paris, Éditions de Luxembourg, 1951, no. 913-737, p. 483; Eng. trans. *Pensées*, A. J. Krailsheimer, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1966, p. 309-310.

³⁰ The second of these parallels Molly Murray’s distinction between “change of church” and “change of soul” (M. Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 7).

³¹ Maurice Blondel, «Le Jansénisme et l’Anti-Jansénisme de Pascal», *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 30:2, Avril-Juin 1923, p. 129-163, here p. 144-146. (My translation.)

took him outside of the established Church of England and thus rendered him liable to persecution, although for a few years under Oliver Cromwell, the Bedford Independents led by John Gifford and then John Burton had possession of the parish church and thus were in some ways within the state church.³²

For Pascal, his new convictions did not entail a formal break with the Catholic Church, but they entailed some kind of identification with the Port-Royal community and the Jansenist movement within French Catholicism that was in tension with the authorities of church and state.³³

The Jansenist and Puritan/separatist social milieus into which Bunyan and Pascal were socialised passed on to their famous adherents an Augustinian theology that taught that God exercised divine prerogative to elect some to salvation and to leave others to their reprobation. Nevertheless, although both Bunyan and Pascal adhere in their doctrine to a fairly austere version of predestination, they nevertheless place their emphasis on the moral responsibility of the unbeliever to seek faith and the moral culpability of those who fail to do so. This is an Augustinian predestinarianism with space for personal agency. Thus Pascal writes that “On n’entend rien aux ouvrages de Dieu si on ne prend pour principe qu’il a voulu aveugler les uns et éclaircir les autres” (“We can understand nothing of God’s works unless we accept the principle that he wished to blind some and enlighten others”),³⁴ but yet Pascal excoriates those who, against their own self-interest, are indifferent regarding spiritual matters. He exclaims at one point, “Cette negligence en une affaire où il s’agit d’eux-mêmes, de leur éternité, de leur tout, m’irrite plus qu’elle ne m’attendrit; elle m’étonne et m’épouvante: c’est un monstre pour moi.” (“Their negligence in a matter where they themselves, their eternity, their all are at stake, fills me more with irritation than pity; it astounds and appals me; it seems quite monstrous to me.”)³⁵

³² “In summer 1653 the Bedford Common Council presented Gifford to the rectory of St. John’s and the mastership of its hospital following the sequestration of the incumbent, Theodore Crowley.” (R. L. Greaves, *op. cit.*, p. 65.) Gifford died in September 1655, and his successor John Burton was chosen by the congregation in January 1656, with Oliver Cromwell affirming their choice over the Council’s preferred candidate William Hayes (R. L. Greaves, *op. cit.*, p. 65-67).

³³ Starting as a convent of nuns, the presence of the abbé Saint-Cyran at Port-Royal as spiritual director spawned other schools and concentric circles of clergy and laity influenced by Saint-Cyran. In their ecclesiastical position, the Jansenists were arguably more akin to the Puritan tendency within the established Church of England from the Elizabethan period to the Civil Wars of the 1640s than to the separatist wing of the Puritan movement to which Bunyan belonged.

³⁴ B. Pascal, ed. cit., L. Lafuma, no. 232-439, p. 158; A. J. Krailsheimer, p. 101.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 156-157.

Likewise, as Michael Davies observes, Bunyan gives comparatively little attention to the question of God's electing decree, instead emphasising the call to all to repent and believe.³⁶ For instance, in his sermon treatise *Good News to the Vilest of Men* (1688), published in the last year of his life, Bunyan exclaims:

lay the thoughts of thy Election by, and ask thy self these questions; Do I see my lost condition? Do I see salvation is no where but in Christ? Would I share in this salvation by Faith of him? And would I, as was said afore, be thoroughly saved, to wit, from the filth, as from the guilt? Do I love Christ, his Father, his Saints, his Word and Ways? This is the way to prove we are Elect.³⁷

Though both Bunyan and Pascal believe that conversion requires divine intervention, both quote on more than one occasion St Paul's words "Faith cometh by hearing", indicating that the vehicle of divine intervention is the word mediated through a human preacher. Although God sovereignly saves those he has chosen, he does so by the use of temporal and human "means".³⁸

For instance, Pascal writes:

La foi est differente de la preuve. L'une est humaine et l'autre est un don de Dieu. *Justus ex fide vivit*. C'est de cette foi que Dieu lui-même met dans le cœur, (*qui fait*) dont la preuve est souvent l'instrument, *fides ex auditu*, mais cette foi est dans le cœur et fait dire (*cre ?*) non *scio* mais *Credo*.

³⁶ Bunyan's theology of grace and predestination is surveyed thoroughly in M. Davies, *op. cit.*, Chapter 1, "A Comfortable Doctrine: John Bunyan's Theology of Grace", p. 17-80, and Pieter de Vries, *John Bunyan and the Order of Salvation*, New York, Peter Lang, 1994, and succinctly summarised in Dewey D. Wallace, Jr., "Bunyan's Theology and Religious Context", in *The Oxford Handbook of John Bunyan*, ed. M. Davies and W. R. Owens, *op. cit.*, p. 69-85. R. L. Greaves comments similarly: "His few references to election and reprobation barely hint at Calvinist predestinarian dogma and pale in comparison to the leitmotif of free will" (*op. cit.*, p. 103). However, I find Greaves's equation of Bunyan's "evangelical concern to convert unbelievers" with a "pastoral Arminianism" (*op. cit.*, p. 110) questionable given that mainstream early modern Calvinists (especially English Puritans) saw the elect as being saved through the means of hearing and believing the preached word.

³⁷ John Bunyan, *Good News for the Vilest of Men*, in *The Miscellaneous Works of John Bunyan* [henceforth *MW*], 13 vols, gen. ed. Roger Sharrock, Oxford, Clarendon, 1976-1994, XI, p. 88.

³⁸ This is the consensus among early modern Reformed Protestants. For instance, a catechism included with some editions of the Geneva Bible gives this illustration: "For as waxe is not melted without heate, nor clay hardened but by meanes thereof: so God useth meanes both to draw those unto himselfe, whom he hath appointed unto saluation, and also to bewray the wickednes of them whom he iustly condemneth." ("Certaine questions and answeres touching the doctrine of Predestination", in *The Bible and holy scriptures conteyned in the Olde and Newe Testament*, London, 1579, n.p. (inserted at beginning of the New Testament).)

The Elizabethan divine Richard Greenham writes likewise: "It is not as men say, if I am elected I cannot perish, I may liue as I list: but if thou art elected, thou art also elected to the meanes of faith, and the fruites of it, else thou art not elected." (Richard Greenham, *Godly Observations, Concerning Divers Arguments and Common Places in Religion*, in *The workes of the reuerend and faithfull seruant of Iesus Christ M. Richard Greenham, minister and preacher of the Word of God* (London, 1605), p. 822.)

Faith is different from proof. One is human and the other a gift of God. *The just shall live by faith.*³⁹ This is the faith that God himself puts into our hearts, often using proof as an instrument. *Faith cometh by hearing.* But this faith is in our hearts, and makes us say not “I know” but “I believe”.⁴⁰

Here Pascal acknowledges the role of human agency in the acquisition of faith alongside the necessity of divine intervention. Pascal here concedes a place for rational apologetics, the role of proof as an instrument, but this instrumental proof is only efficacious in conjunction with the divine gift of faith.

Leszek Kolakowski’s study of Pascal’s Jansenism notes that Jansenists, like Puritans, appeal to a dual divine and human agency to justify human endeavours of persuasion to conversion alongside trust in divine predestination to conversion:

A Jansenist embarking upon missionary work, pastoral or literary, falls naturally into a theological quandary: however zealous he might be, he knows that really to convert a sinner is exclusively God’s business, rather than his. Genuine faith belongs to the supernatural order and can never be produced by human effort, either by a priest or by the convert-to-be. So what is this effort for? The Jansenists, and the Calvinists, for that matter, did not bother about these kinds of objections. [...] God’s ways of converting sinners are various, and it is normal, rather than exceptional, that he should employ other people as his tools. I can never be sure that I will be effective working as an instrument, but I must do my duty nevertheless; otherwise why would Jesus have sent his disciples to preach his truth to heathens?⁴¹

Bunyan, like Pascal, uses the language of instrumentality – speaking of his preaching in *Grace Abounding*, Bunyan says: “they would also bless God for me (unworthy Wretch that I am!) and count me Gods Instrument that shewed to them the Way of Salvation.”⁴² Nevertheless, although the human preacher serves as an instrument in conveying divine truth, divine intervention is essential for that truth to be efficacious, as a marginal note in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* informs us when Christian seeks unsuccessfully to persuade Simple, Sloth

³⁹ Romans 1:17 (also Galatians 3:11 and Hebrews 10:38, drawing on Habakkuk 2:4). Though a Catholic, Pascal here cites a biblical text that was central to Luther’s understanding of justification through faith alone, a doctrine central to Bunyan’s theology also.

⁴⁰ B. Pascal, ed. cit.; L. Lafuma, no. 7-30, p. 34; A. J. Krailshaimer, p. 34.

⁴¹ L. Kolakowski, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

⁴² J. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, ed. cit., p. 85.

and Presumption to awake from their wayside slumber: “*There is no perswasion will do, if God openeth not the eyes.*”⁴³

Bunyan uses the phrase “Faith cometh [or ‘comes’] by hearing” on several occasions across his writings.⁴⁴ One of the most striking instances is in Bunyan’s little read catechetical text *Instruction for the Ignorant*, published in 1675, which contains the following exchange:⁴⁵

Q. *I am convinced that I was once without Faith, and also that I cannot fetch it, but pray tell me the way of its coming?*

A. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God, *Rom.* 10. 17.

Q. *How by hearing?*

A. God mixeth it with the Word, when he absolutely intendeth the Salvation of the sinner, *Heb.* 4. 2, 3. *Act.* 13. 48.

Q. *And how do Men hear when Faith is mixed with the Word?*

A. They hear the Word not as the word of Man, but as it is in truth the Word of God, which worketh effectually in them that believe, *1 Thes.* 2. 13.

Q. *Pray tell me now the manner of its coming?*

A. It comes through difficulty, it comes gradually.⁴⁶

This series of questions demonstrates a striking combination: while faith is received passively in a sense, with the agency being attributed to “the Word of God, which worketh effectually in them that believe”, the listener is responsible to be receptive to a faith that “comes through difficulty” and “comes gradually”. This stress on the gradual and difficult acquisition of saving faith accords with the personal experience both of Bunyan and Pascal, experience that arguably underlies the more imaginative approaches that both writers took to persuading their audience towards a vital inward faith.

⁴³ J. Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, ed. cit., p. 39.

⁴⁴ The online version of the Oxford Clarendon edition of Bunyan’s works gives nine instances of this phrase (if we conflate “comes” and “cometh”): Bunyan, *A Relation of my Imprisonment*, in *Grace Abounding*, ed. cit., p. 115; *A Defence of the Doctrine of Justification, by Faith* [1672], *MW*, ed. cit., IV, p. 29, 61 (twice, including “Faith (I say) cometh by hearing”); *A Confession of My Faith, and the Reason of My Practice* [1672], *MW*, ed. cit., IV, p. 149. *Instruction for the Ignorant* [1675], in *MW*, ed. cit., VIII, p. 32; *Israel’s Hope Encouraged* [posthumous publication 1692], in *MW*, ed. cit., XIII, p. 7 (twice); *Christ a Compleat Saviour* [posthumous publication 1692], in *MW*, ed. cit., XIII, p. 311.

⁴⁵ On Bunyan’s use of catechesis in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* as well as *Instruction for the Ignorant*, see Dennis Danielson, “Catechism, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, and the Pilgrim’s Progress”, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 94:1, January 1995, p. 42-58.

⁴⁶ J. Bunyan, *Instruction for the Ignorant*, in *MW*, ed. cit., VIII, p. 31-32.

Persuasion through imagination

Although much of the written output of both Bunyan and Pascal in terms of volume is written in a fairly straightforward didactic style (in Bunyan's non-fictional expositions and Pascal's scientific writing), both writers are remembered primarily for those works of theirs and those dimensions of their works that go beyond didactic exposition in favour of imaginative and somewhat indirect modes of persuasion. In Pascal's case, the unconventional and fragmentary literary form of his main apologetic work, the *Pensées*, is arguably an accidental (or perhaps providential) consequence of this being a collection of notes for a fuller apologetic treatise that was left unfinished at Pascal's death at the age of 39: as T.S. Eliot notes, "we have, in Saint-Beuve's words, a tower of which the stones have been laid on each other, but not cemented, and the structure unfinished".⁴⁷ However, the *Pensées* also contain explicit appeals to the reader's imagination and passions alongside rational arguments from nature and from biblical exegesis. Bunyan appeals to the imagination most obviously in his narratives, especially *The Pilgrim's Progress*, but his sermon treatises also contain vivid sensory and narrative vignettes.

Both Bunyan and Pascal have ambivalent attitudes towards imagination, but both recognise its power. Pascal writes of imagination that

C'est cette partie dominante dans l'homme (*cause de tous les déportements*), cette maîtresse (*pièce*) d'erreur et de fausseté, (*si insigne fourbe*) et (*en cela plus insigne*) d'autant plus fourbe qu'elle ne l'est pas toujours, car elle serait règle infaillible de vérité si elle l'était infaillible du mensonge.

It is the dominant faculty in man, master of error and falsehood, all the more deceptive for not being invariably so; for it would be an infallible criterion of truth if it were infallibly that of lies. Since, however, it is usually false, it gives no indication of its quality, setting the same mark on true and false alike.⁴⁸

Pascal appears to have a predominantly negative view of the imagination here. He can be read as saying that, by right, one ought to privilege reason over imagination, as, given the correct premises, reason is more likely to arrive at the truth.⁴⁹ However, in practice, imagination

⁴⁷ T. S. Eliot, *op. cit.*, p. 407.

⁴⁸ B. Pascal, ed. cit., L. Lafuma, no. 44-81, p. 42; A. J. Krailsheimer, p. 38.

⁴⁹ Although Pascal is sceptical about the powers of fallen human reason to arrive at truth: "Tout notre raisonnement se (*d*) réduit à céder au sentiment [...] La raison s'offre mais elle est ployable à tous sens." ("All our reasoning comes down to surrendering to feeling. [...] Reason is available but can be bent in any direction.") (ed. cit., L. Lafuma, no. 530-2, p. 356; A. J. Krailsheimer, p. 216).

has a greater power to make things appear to be true. Pascal comments that “*Jamais la raison [...] (ne surmonte) totalement l’imagination, (mais le) contraire est ordinaire.*” (“Reason never wholly overcomes imagination, while the contrary is quite common.”)⁵⁰ Thus, in order to persuade human beings of the truth, we must appeal to the imagination in order to overcome the distortions of fallen reason.

Bunyan also has an ambivalent view of the imagination. Bethany Joy Bear has explored the tension between the fact that “Like many English Puritans and Dissenters, Bunyan consistently links the exercise of ‘fancy,’ or imagination, to delusion, falsehood, and faithlessness in his sermons, theological treatises, and tracts” and the fact that Bunyan seeks to accomplish his didactic goals in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* through appeal to the imagination.⁵¹ Bear traces how “fancy” in Bunyan can signal illusory perception that corrupts right reason and sound faith, but also how, in Bunyan’s works, the faculty of the imagination can be used by the Holy Spirit and the godly author as a means to sanctification through reorienting the affections of the hearer or reader. Bunyan follows here in the tradition of the earlier seventeenth-century Cambridge minister Richard Sibbes, who argues for the possibility of “a sanctified *fancie*” that “will make every creature a *ladder to heaven*”.⁵² One distinctive contribution Bear makes that merits further exploration is to identify Christiana (Christian’s wife) in *The Second Part of the Pilgrim’s Progress* as a figure who embodies the sanctified fancy.

In a justly influential older study, U. Milo Kaufmann characterises Bunyan’s adoption of allegory as a shift away from a common Puritan preference for *logos* (didactic, propositional communication) to *mythos* (allusive, indirect communication).⁵³ Kaufmann’s sympathies are apparently with *mythos*, since it allows for a pluriformity of responses on the part of the reader congenial to a literary scholar, rather than the supposed fixed dogmas of *logos*, but I would argue that both are prominent in Bunyan’s corpus. Bunyan’s most explicit defence of his imaginative persuasion is found in the verse prefaces to the two parts of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, in which Bunyan seeks to counteract the suspicions of communicating divine truth through imaginative fiction that he anticipated from his Reformed or Puritan contemporaries.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 40

⁵¹ Bethany Joy Bear, “Fantastical Faith: John Bunyan and the Sanctification of Fancy”, *Studies in Philology*, 109:5, Fall 2012, p. 671-701, here p. 672.

⁵² Richard Sibbes, *The Soules Conflict with It Selfe, and Victory over It Self by Faith*, London, 1635, p. 200.

⁵³ U. M. Kaufmann, *op. cit.*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1966, esp. p. 8-21, 151-174.

In the first of these, “The Author’s Apology for his Book”, Bunyan responds to the objection that “it is feigned”⁵⁴ by finding biblical precedent for his imaginative persuasion, claiming that, like the metaphors of the prophets and the parables of Jesus:

*This Book is writ in such a Dialect,
As may the minds of listless men affect:
It seems a Novelty, and yet contains
Nothing but sound and honest Gospel-strains.*⁵⁵

In other words, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* is written in a mode that speaks the same language as worldly readers who may not pick up a doctrinal treatise but may read a prose romance of the kind that *The Pilgrim’s Progress* resembles.⁵⁶

Pascal likewise advocates appeal to the aesthetic and imaginative senses before rational argument in order to overcome emotional resistance to religious truth before seeking to demonstrate it rationally:

Les hommes ont mépris pour la religion. Ils en ont haine et peur qu’elle soit vraie. Pour guérir cela il faut commencer par montrer que la religion n’est point contraire à la raison. Vénérable, en donner respect. La rendre ensuite aimable, faire souhaiter aux bons qu’elle fût vraie, et puis montrer qu’elle est vraie.

Men despise religion. They hate it and are afraid it may be true. The cure for this is first to show that religion is not contrary to reason, but worthy of reverence and respect. Next make it attractive, make good men wish it were true, and then show that it is.⁵⁷

Pascal follows his own advice through the use of imaginative narrative vignettes among the *pensées* in the process of being assembled, alongside more deductive logical arguments and biblical exegesis. For instance:

Qu’on s’imagine un nombre d’hommes dans les chaînes, et tous condamnés à la mort, dont les uns étant chaque jour égorgés à la vue des autres, ceux qui restent voient leur propre condition dans celle de leurs semblables, et, se regardant l’un l’autre avec douleur et sans espérance, attendent à leur tour. C’est l’image de la condition des hommes.

⁵⁴ J. Bunyan, “The Author’s Apology for his Book”, in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, ed. cit., p. 4.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁵⁶ See, for instance, Nick Davis, “Bunyan and Romance”, in *The Oxford Handbook of John Bunyan*, ed. M. Davies and W. R. Owens, *op. cit.*, p. 379–96. Michael Davies, however, argues that Bunyan reformulates the romance mode in order to prevent his work being read purely as romance (*op. cit.*, p. 175–291).

⁵⁷ B. Pascal, ed. cit., L. Lafuma, no. 12-35, p. 34; A. J. Krailsheimer, p. 34.

Imagine a number of men in chains, all under sentence of death, some of whom are each day butchered in the sight of the others; those remaining see their own condition in that of their fellows, and looking at each other with grief and despair await their turn. This is an image of the human condition.⁵⁸

Though Pascal's *Pensées* does not contain extended narratives, it contains plenty of "images, imagistic sketches, vignettes, and related observations", that Martin Warner has recently noted "retain their imaginative vigour" for readers today when "A significant proportion of the [other] fragments [...] are today little more than historical curiosities or otherwise inert".⁵⁹

Playing the fool

Bunyan provides similar justifications of his use of creative literary genres for teaching doctrinal truth in a handful of volumes of verse that he wrote. For instance, he writes in *Profitable Meditations* (1661) that "'Tis not the Method, but the Truth alone / Should please a Saint, and mollifie his heart".⁶⁰ Here Bunyan is apologetic in the modern sense about the need to resort to the honey of poetry to sweeten the pill of truth, as truth should be delightful to the truly godly no matter the literary mode in which it is presented. However, Bunyan recognises that "*Man's heart is apt in Meeter to delight*", and so uses metre to win a hearing for the truth. This seems to give a rather grudging approval to literary appeal as a concession to the superficial tastes of sinners.⁶¹

Similarly, Bunyan opens his collection of verse for children, *A Book for Boys and Girls* (1686), with a verse address "To the Reader" in which he justifies his choice of genre by noting that his verse may be beneficial not only to children but also to grown men and women whose judgement in spiritual things remains childish:

*Our Bearded men, do act like Beardless Boys;
Our Women please themselves with childish Toys.
Our Ministers, long time by Word and Pen,
Dealt with them, counting them, not Boys but Men:
Thunder-bolts they shot at them, and their Toys:*

⁵⁸ B. Pascal, ed. cit., L. Lafuma, no. 434-314, p. 256; A. J. Krailsheimer, p. 165.

⁵⁹ Martin Warner, *The Aesthetics of Argument*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 260.

⁶⁰ John Bunyan, *Profitable Meditations* [1661], ed. Graham Midgeley, in *MW*, ed. cit., VI, p. 4.

⁶¹ On Bunyan's pragmatic rhetorical use of verse to accomplish didactic ends, see Elizabeth Clarke, "'Truth in Meeter': Bunyan's Poetry and Dissenting Poetics", in *The Oxford Handbook of John Bunyan*, ed. M. Davies and W. R. Owens, *op. cit.*, p. 324-42.

*But hit them not, 'cause they were Girls and Boys.
The better Charge, the wider still they shot,
Or else so high, those Dwarfs they touched not.
Instead of Men, they found them Girls and Boys,
Addict to nothing as to childish Toys.*⁶²

Bunyan suggests that the conventional persuasive strategies adopted by grave ministers hurling thunderbolts from the pulpit are inefficacious when it comes to these childish adults, and that imaginative verse ostensibly written for children may be more effective in persuading them. Just as the “Apology” for *The Pilgrim’s Progress* cites scriptural precedent for its persuasive strategy, so does *A Book for Boys and Girls*:

*Paul seem’d to play the Fool, that he might gain
Those that were Fools indeed, if not in Grain.*⁶³

Bunyan here seems to be alluding to the words of St Paul, who tells the rhetorically sophisticated Corinthians that “I speak as a fool” (2 Corinthians 11:23), and adopts the modes of speaking of his doctrinal opponents in order to show them up as ridiculous. This Pauline paradox of taking on the persona of the fool in order to subvert the foolishness of one’s audience is picked up in the early modern period, for instance, by Erasmus’s *Praise of Folly*.⁶⁴

Bunyan goes on to appeal to the example of Solomon in the book of Proverbs as a precedent for his poems on frogs, eggs and candles that will follow:

*Wise Solomon did Fools to Piss-ants send,
To learn true Wisdom, and their Lives to mend.
Yea, God by Swallows, Cuckows, and the Ass,
Shews they are Fools who let that season pass,
Which he put in their hand, that to obtain
Which is both present, and Eternal Gain.*⁶⁵

The same rhetorical and apologetic stance underlies and helps us to understand better one of the most famous and somewhat notorious sections of the *Pensées*, generally known as “Pascal’s wager”, though Pascal entitles it “Infini – Rien” (“Infinity – nothing”).⁶⁶ The section

⁶² J. Bunyan, “To the Reader”, in *A Book for Boys and Girls* [1686], in *MW*, ed. cit., VI, p. 190.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, VI:191.

⁶⁴ See M. A. Screech, *Laughter at the Foot of the Cross*, Harmondsworth, Penguin/Allen Lane, 1997.

⁶⁵ J. Bunyan, “To the Reader”, in *A Book for Boys and Girls*, in *MW*, ed. cit., VI, p. 192.

⁶⁶ B. Pascal, ed. cit., L. Lafuma, no. 418-343, p. 237–40; A. J. Krailsheimer, p. 149–53. On the “wager”, see, for instance, Patricia Topliss, *The Rhetoric of Pascal: A Study of his Art of Persuasion in the Provinciales and the*

is written as a dialogue, with two voices in play. The initial narrating voice, perhaps more naturally identified with Pascal as author, begins with a meditation on the nature of infinity and how humans can know that such a thing exists without being able to comprehend its nature.

This voice then states, “Parlons maintenant selon les lumières naturelles.” (“Let us now speak according to our natural lights”).⁶⁷ In other words, Pascal is choosing as a matter of argumentative strategy not to rely explicitly on special divine revelation through Scripture or through religious experience, but rather to reason from the human experience common both to him and to his unbelieving interlocutor. As Patricia Topliss notes, despite her suspicions of the intellectual merits of the wager, “it matters little if the argument is trivial provided that it arrests the attention [...] It should be judged as a psychological manoeuvre.”⁶⁸

In St Paul’s words, Pascal’s spokesperson here speaks as a fool. The wager is an appeal not to the world as it truly is from Pascal’s believing standpoint, but to the world as it is experienced to be by his worldly interlocutor. It is when speaking *selon les lumières naturelles*, bracketing out divine revelation, that Pascal states that we are incapable of knowing what God is or whether he is. From this perspective, Pascal continues, the Christian gospel appears to be folly, *stultitiam*. It is perhaps his gambling friends in Paris or his fellow mathematicians that Pascal has in mind when he says, “Il se joue un jeu, (*dans*) à l’extrémité de cette (*eno*) distance infinie, où il arrivera croix ou pile. Que gagerez-vous?” (“At the far end of this infinite distance a coin is being spun which will come down heads or tails. How will you wager?”)⁶⁹

Pascal’s voice is thus inhabiting and subverting the thought categories of his pragmatically self-interested worldly readers. It is in this context that Pascal makes the famous argument that, since one must wager, betting on God’s existence is the rational choice in the self-interest of the gambler:

Pensées, Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1966, p. 190-198; J. K. Ryan, “The Argument of the Wager in Pascal and Others”, *The New Scholasticism* 19, 1945, p. 233-240; D. Adamson, *op. cit.*, p. 161-173; G. Tomlin, *op. cit.*, p. 240-245; and Paul Bartha and Lawrence Pasternack (eds), *Pascal’s Wager*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018. Alain Cantillon’s recent iconoclastic study of this fragment focuses on its complex textual history to call into question the ordering and thus logical sequence of Pascal’s argument: Alain Cantillon, *Le Pari-de-Pascal: Étude Littéraire d’une Série d’Énonciations*, Paris, Vrin, 2014. Topliss and Ryan note that the thrust of the wager is present in earlier writers, but the mathematical probabilistic framing is distinctive to Pascal, perhaps to appeal to the gambling friends of his “worldly” period that interposed between his first and second conversions.

⁶⁷ B. Pascal, ed. cit., L. Lafuma, no. 418-343, p. 237; A. J. Krailsheimer, p. 150.

⁶⁸ P. Topliss, *op. cit.*, p. 196-197.

⁶⁹ Pascal, ed. cit., L. Lafuma, no. 418-343, p. 238; A. J. Krailsheimer, p. 150.

mais il y a ici une infinité de vie infiniment heureuse a gagner (*et autant de hasard de gain que*), un hasard de gain contre un nombre fini de hasards de perte (*cela ôte tout*), et ce que vous jouez est fini. Cela ôte tout parti partout où est (*il*) l'infini, et ou il n'y a pas infinite de hasards de perte contre celui de gain, il n'y a point a balancer, il faut tout donner.

But here there is an infinity of an infinitely happy life to be won, one chance of winning against a finite number of chances of losing, and what you are staking is finite. That leaves no choice; wherever there is infinity, and where there are not infinite chances of losing against that of winning, there is no room for hesitation, you must give everything.⁷⁰

As understood on a popular level, Pascal's wager comes in for significant and understandable criticism. One point of objection is that it seems that Pascal is encouraging his readers to will themselves into believing something that does not commend itself to their rational faculties as actually true, which, the critics object, is impossible as well as ethically dubious. For instance, Richard Dawkins objects: "Believing is not something you can decide to do as a matter of policy. At least, it is not something I can decide to do as an act of the will."⁷¹

However, when the whole section is read in context, this is not quite what Pascal exhorts his readers to do. Rather, having appealed to the worldly interlocutor's rational self-interest in order to persuade him that faith in God is desirable, Pascal's speaker advises his interlocutor to seek to obtain such faith by positioning himself where he is likely to obtain it:

apprenez (*les*) de ceux, etc... qui ont été liés comme vous, et qui parient maintenant tout leur bien [...] (*pren*) suivez la manière par où ils ont commencé. C'est en faisant tout comme s'ils croyoient, en prenant de l'eau bénite, en faisant dire des messes, etc. Naturellement (*par là*) même cela vous fera croire et vous abêtira.

learn from those who were once bound like you and who now wager all they have [...] follow the way by which they began. They behaved just as if they did believe, taking holy water, having masses said, and so on. That will make you believe quite naturally, and will make you more docile [*abêtira*].⁷²

The word that Krailsheimer here translates as "make you more docile" is *abêtira*, etymologically meaning to become like an animal (*une bête*). Graham Tomlin notes that this

⁷⁰ Pascal, *op. cit.*, Lafuma, no. 418-343, p. 239; Krailsheimer, p. 151.

⁷¹ Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, London, Black Swan, 2006, 2016, p. 130.

⁷² Pascal, *op. cit.*, Lafuma, no. 418-343, p. 240; Krailsheimer, p. 152.

passage was omitted from the 1670 Port Royal edition of the *Pensées*, suggesting that Pascal's first editors found it too shocking to include.⁷³ Tomlin surveys various interpretations of the word, but suggests that *abêtira* includes the sense of passivity as well as apparent foolishness:

The force of *abêtira* then, is to suggest that acting in this way will make one stupid enough to believe this "foolish" message, and passive ("docile") enough to receive the gift of faith. To believe involves a submission of will and of reason, an acknowledgement of the relativity of one's own standpoint, and the willingness to adopt another. [...] The unbeliever is to submit to the folly of Christianity, to become passive before God and the church, to change perspectives.⁷⁴

Pascal's wager seeks to persuade the worldly gambler that it is in one's rational interest to lay down one's cognitive guard against faith, and to allow one's consciousness to be reinscribed by a believing imagination. Pascal observes that belief is shaped by habit, and seeks to bring about conversion through a habituation of the mind and imagination:

Les preuves ne convainquent que l'esprit, la coutume fait nos preuves les plus fortes et les plus crues. Elle incline l'automate qui entraîne l'esprit sans qu'il y pense. [...] Enfin il faut avoir recours à elle quand une fois (*nous avons*) l'esprit a vu où est la vérité afin de nous (*en*) abreuver et nous teindre de cette créance qui nous échappe à toute heure, car d'en avoir toujours les preuves présentes c'est trop d'affaire.

Proofs only convince the mind; habit provides the strongest proofs and those that are most believed. It inclines the automaton, which leads the mind unconsciously along with it. [...] In short, we must resort to habit once the mind has seen where the truth lies, in order to steep and stain ourselves in that belief which constantly eludes us, for it is too much trouble to have the proofs always before us.⁷⁵

Bunyan would strongly reject the Catholic sacramental particulars of Pascal's "masses" and "holy water", since he has both anti-Catholic and anti-sacramentalist views, though, as Richard Greaves notes, "Throughout most of Bunyan's career anti-Catholicism was not a dominant theme in his writings",⁷⁶ since he had more immediate religious others with which to contend in defence of his evangelical Nonconformity.

⁷³ G. Tomlin, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

⁷⁴ G. Tomlin, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

⁷⁵ B. Pascal, ed. cit., L. Lafuma, no. 821-7, p. 439; A. J. Krailsheimer, p. 274.

⁷⁶ Richard L. Greaves, "John Bunyan and the Changing Face of Popery", *Bunyan Studies*, 1.1, Autumn 1988, p. 15-25, here p. 15. Bunyan was suspicious not only of popish or high Anglican sacramentalism but also of what he deemed excessive emphasis on the "ordinances" of baptism and the Lord's Supper among Nonconformists. This concern underlies Bunyan's conflicts of the 1670s with "closed communion" Baptists such as Thomas Paul and William Kiffin, who considered the baptism of adult believers as the necessary precondition for membership of the gathered church.

Nevertheless, although the sacramental forms of habituation into faith that Pascal recommended would be rejected by Bunyan, the general principle is present in Bunyan's work in another form. Bunyan, like Pascal, also has a proximate goal of persuading his readers and hearers to place themselves in an environment where they can be habituated into faith. While both men believe that the divine grace that confers salvation cannot be merited by human action, both seek to persuade their readers and hearers to position themselves in places and within patterns of thought that will make them more conducive to receiving this unmerited divine grace.

This call to exercise one's agency to place oneself in a position to receive unmerited grace has affinities with "preparationism", a tendency that emerged within some strands of Puritan piety and pastoral guidance that exhorted those as yet unregenerate (or who feared themselves to be such) to prepare themselves for the receipt of saving grace through attendance on the ordinances of prayer, scripture reading and meditation, public preaching and the like.⁷⁷ Preparationism attracted controversy as at times it comes perilously close to suggesting that the bestowal of grace can be earned through religious practice, which would violate Reformation convictions on salvation being *sola gratia* (by grace alone), but the boundaries are somewhat blurry, as the prospective convert's engagement with the means of grace can itself be seen as a preparatory work of the Spirit rather than as meritorious actions for which the sinner can claim credit.

Bunyan's and Pascal's apologetics can be seen as engaging in a kind of imaginative preparationism. The subversive apologist for a vital Christian faith seeks to habituate the imagination of the hearer or reader to incline the recipient's mind to be a passive recipient of the divine grace that brings salvation. This kind of subversive apologetic seeks to reshape for the individuals it addresses what sociologist Peter Berger calls "plausibility structures" and what philosopher and intellectual historian Charles Taylor calls "social imaginaries", in order to make a believing social imaginary plausible to them.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ See especially Norman Pettit, *The Heart Prepared: Grace and Conversion in Puritan Spiritual Life*, 1966; 2nd ed. Middletown, Conn., Wesleyan University Press, 1989. For a thoughtful recent study from a confessionally Reformed standpoint, see Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Prepared by Grace, for Grace: The Puritans on God's Ordinary Way of Leading Sinners to Christ*, Grand Rapids, MI, Reformation Heritage Books, 2013.

⁷⁸ E.g. Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, 1967; repr. New York, Anchor, 1990, esp. p. 45-51, and p. 123-170; Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Cambridge, MA, Belknap/Harvard University Press, 2007, esp. p. 159-211.

A contemporary instance of this dynamic from the potential convert's perspective can be found in the cultural anthropologist Susan Harding's ethnographic work with American evangelical Christians. Harding records how, driving home from interviewing a Baptist pastor, she is involved in a near collision: "I slammed on the brakes, sat stunned for a split second, and asked myself 'What is God trying to tell me?'" Harding is startled to find this thought entering her mind:

It was my voice but not my language. I had been inhabited by the fundamental Baptist tongue I was investigating. As the Reverend Campbell might have put it, the Holy Spirit was dealing with me, speaking to my heart, bringing me under conviction. He was showing me that life is a passing thing, that death could take me in an instant, no matter how much control I fancied I had over my life, and that I should put my life in the Lord's hands before it was too late.⁷⁹

Harding's article then switches from anecdote to analysis, explaining that, by opening herself to listen to the Reverend Campbell, she had unwittingly begun to be converted:

The process starts when an unsaved listener begins to appropriate in his or her inner speech the saved speaker's language and its attendant view of the world. The speaker's language, now in the listener's voice, converts the listener's mind into a contested terrain, a divided self. At the moment of salvation, which may come quickly and easily, or much later after great inward turmoil, the listener becomes a speaker. The Christian tongue locks into some kind of central, controlling, dominant place; it has gone beyond the point of inhabiting the listener's mind to occupy the listener's identity.⁸⁰

Graham Ward writes of how Bunyan's encounter with the poor women in the sun likewise leads to the learning of a new language that creates a "new world" of faith in Bunyan's experience of reality:

It is the appropriation of their language that preoccupies him in the autobiography that follows, for when he looks "into the Bible with new eyes and read[s] as I never did read before" God begins to "create still within me such suppositions" (GA p. 17) as would form the basis for his own "new world"; a world revealed through and described in terms of the language of Scripture.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Susan Friend Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000, p. 33-34.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁸¹ Graham Ward, "To Be a Reader: John Bunyan's Struggle with the Language of Scripture in *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*", *Literature and Theology* 4, 1990, p. 29-49, here p. 37.

Pascal and Bunyan are in their different ways engaged in the process of appealing to the imagination in order to entice the unregenerate mind to entertain and to become habituated to the thought world of faith. While both Bunyan and Pascal believe that the message of salvation cannot be attained by unaided human reason or imagination, appeal to the imagination can persuade the reason to be open to the divine revelation that offers salvation.

Theologian William Dyrness chooses Bunyan as a model for a “Protestant aesthetic” that recognises a discontinuity between the world as it appears to us in its brokenness and the divine truth to which it testifies when interpreted rightly. He contrasts this with a “Catholic aesthetic” that he identifies with Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, which expects a more straightforward analogical relationship between things in earthly experience and the heavenly realities of which they are signs. The Protestant aesthetic that Dyrness finds in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* is suspicious of outward appearances, but it is not that earthly experience teaches us nothing of value, but that our experience must be rightly interpreted in light of the revelation of Scripture in order to teach us what it should. Dyrness holds up *The Pilgrim’s Progress* as an example of a narrative that teaches us to reconfigure our reading of the world and to reorient our own lives accordingly:

Those forms and stories function best that encourage the viewer and hearer to reconstrue the pattern of their life, to reinterpret that pattern in accordance with the biblical truth, and, more importantly, to direct one’s life in accordance with what is seen.⁸²

Though Dyrness sees this aesthetic of reading a broken world against the grain as distinctly Protestant, it is an oversimplification to see it as uniquely Protestant. Among Catholic thinkers who display similar tendencies is Pascal, especially in his emphases on the ambiguity of the world as we often experience it, and the hidden God revealing himself obscurely so that we have to seek him to find him.⁸³

Il a voulu se rendre parfaitement connaissable à ceux-là, et ainsi voulant paraître à découvert à ceux qui le cherchent de tout leur cœur, et caché à ceux qui le fuient de tout

⁸² William A. Dyrness, “Dante, Bunyan and the Case for a Protestant Aesthetics”, *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 10.3, July 2008, p. 285-302, here p. 300.

⁸³ On the “hidden God” (*Dieu caché/Deus absconditus*) in Pascal (a theme with parallels in Luther among others), see G. Tomlin, *op. cit.*, p. 212-215 (and p. 199-201 on the parallel theme in Luther), and especially Lucien Goldmann, *Le dieu caché; étude sur la vision tragique dans les Pensées de Pascal et dans le théâtre de Racine*. Paris: Gallimard, 1955; Eng. trans. *The Hidden God: A Study of Tragic Vision in the Pensées of Pascal and the Tragedies of Racine*, trans. Philip Thody, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964.

leur cœur, il a tempéré [...] sa connaissance en sorte qu'il a donné des marques (*visibles*) de soi (*aux uns*) visibles à ceux qui [...] le cherchent et (*invisib*) non à ceux qui ne le cherchent pas.

Il y a assez de lumière pour ceux qui ne désirent que de voir et assez d'obscurité pour ceux qui ont une disposition contraire.

Thus wishing to appear openly to those who seek him with all their heart and hidden from those who shun him with all their heart, he has qualified our knowledge of him by giving signs which can be seen by those who seek him and not by those who do not.

"There is enough light for those who desire only to see, and enough darkness for those of a contrary disposition."⁸⁴

In this connection, Graham Tomlin, previously an Oxford church historian and now Anglican bishop of Kensington, hails Pascal as an apologist especially apt for the post-Christian Western culture of today:

Pascal's point is that before we ever get to the stage of explaining or convincing, there needs to emerge in people the desire, the hunger to ask the question, to discover more, to find God. Now Pascal, like the great St Augustine before him, was fully aware that only God does that, only God can touch the heart and make it long for himself; yet he also knew that God often uses people like himself and ourselves to awaken that desire.⁸⁵

In contemporary Christian thinking and apologetic endeavour, there has been a resurgence of interest in "imaginative apologetics", which makes a subversive appeal to the imagination to circumvent the cognitive resistance of unbelievers and entice them towards faith.⁸⁶ In their different ways, Bunyan and Pascal could both be models for this movement.

Both Bunyan and Pascal were willing to risk accusations of irrationality to invite their audiences into a different mode of reasoning. In both parts of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the words "fool" and "foolish" are used both of the pilgrims by their detractors, and by the pilgrims of the worldly characters. The godly Mr Sagacity says of Christiana and her sons that "they all plaid the Fool at the first" in their refusal to listen to Christian,⁸⁷ but yet when they set out in

⁸⁴ B. Pascal ed. cit., L. Lafuma, no. 149-309, p. 113; A. J. Krailsheimer, p. 80.

⁸⁵ Graham Tomlin, *The Provocative Church*, 4th ed. London, SPCK, 2014, p. 12. Pascal is also praised as a particularly apposite Christian thinker for the present moment by contemporary Christian apologists. See, for instance, Douglas Groothuis, "Deposed Royalty: Pascal's Anthropological Argument", *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 41.2, June 1998, 297-313; Peter Kreeft, *Christianity for Modern Pagans: Pascal's Pensées Edited, Outlined, and Explained*, San Francisco, Ignatius, 1993; and Os Guinness, *Fool's Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion*, Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity, 2015, p. 100-101, 125.

⁸⁶ For instance, Holly Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian Imagination: An Integrated Approach to Defending the Faith*, 2nd ed.; Steubenville, OH, Emmaus Road, 2017; Andrew Davison (ed.), *Imaginative Apologetics: Theology, Philosophy, and the Catholic Tradition*, London, SCM, 2011; O. Guinness, *op. cit.*

⁸⁷ J. Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. cit., p. 176.

Christian's footsteps, the worldly Mrs Inconsiderate exclaims, "away with such Fantastical Fools from the Town."⁸⁸ This slippery use of the word "fool" demonstrates that both wisdom and folly are in the eye of the beholder. As Bethany Bear notes, "Ultimately, Bunyan argues that the fancy, derided by both the world and the conventicle as a faculty prone to foolishness, becomes one of the Spirit's most powerful means of sanctification."⁸⁹ For both Bunyan and Pascal, we cannot avoid playing the fool. The question is what kind of fool we choose to play.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

⁸⁹ B. J. Bear, art. cit., p. 399.